

Men's roles in sexual violence and exploitation in prostitution and their prevention

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Introduction

I focus in the following on men's roles in sexual exploitation and violence in prostitution and their prevention. I focus particularly on men's involvements as buyers of commercial sex – in other words, on male 'prostitute users' or 'clients' or 'Johns', on the sexual violence and coercion involved here, and on how to prevent these.

This discussion extends the substantial work I've done on men's roles in violence against women and its prevention. I've recently written an overview and assessment of strategies for engaging men in the primary prevention of violence against women, and I can send copies to anyone who wishes.

I want to offer a couple of caveats. First, I focus particularly on men's involvements in *heterosexual* prostitution, rather than in male-male or homosexual prostitution. Second, I focus on prostitution, rather than trafficking, although I recognise that the two are powerfully, and some would say inextricably, related.

Prostitution: Some introductory comments

Prostitution is widespread, even in places where it is illegal, and gender and other inequalities are fundamental factors in the structuring of prostitution. Globally, the vast majority of those who sell sex are female and poor (Sullivan 2007).

Feminist debates over prostitution...

There are passionate feminist debates over prostitution. Some argue that prostitution is always forced and thus the same as rape. Prostitution in effect is 'paid rape'. Prostitution needs to be seen, then, as a basic violation of women's human rights and to be subject to strong criminal penalties. Other feminists argue that prostitution should be seen as a form of work; attention then is focussed on maximising the labour and human rights of sex workers, including the decriminalisation of prostitution (Sullivan 2007).

Men in prostitution: clients, sex workers, and organisers and managers (including pimps and traffickers)

Men are the main participants in prostitution. They are the vast majority of prostitution *clients* world-wide. Men also participate in prostitution as *sex workers* (mostly seeing male clients). Finally, men are major actors in the *organisation and management of prostitution* (Sullivan 2007).

What proportion of men buy sex?

The table below shows you the proportions of men who have ever bought sex.

Proportions of men who have ever bought sex

Country	%	Year	Source
Australia	19	1986	Rissel <i>et al.</i> , 2003
Australia	16	2002	Rissel <i>et al.</i> , 2003
Finland	13	1999	Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch, 2000
Norway	11	1992	Leridon <i>et al.</i> , 1998

Sweden	13	1996	Lewin <i>et al.</i> , 1998
Great Britain	7	1991	Wellings <i>et al.</i> , 1993
Netherlands	14	1989	Leridon <i>et al.</i> , 1998
Switzerland	19	1992	Leridon <i>et al.</i> , 1998
Spain	39	1992	Leridon <i>et al.</i> , 1998
Sweden	13	2000	National Institute of Public Health, 2000
Russia (St Petersburg)	10	1996	Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch, 2000
Thailand	73	2003	Anderson & O'Connell Davidson, 2003
UK (Glasgow)	10	2006	Groom and Nandwani, 2006
UK (Greater London)	9	2001	Johnson <i>et al.</i> , 2001
UK	9	2000	Ward <i>et al.</i> , 2005
United States	16	1992	Michael <i>et al.</i> , 1994

(This table modifies and extends that compiled by Mansson 2003.)

There are some things to note.

(1) At least some of these statistics are likely to be under-representations, given the stigma attached to paying for sex.

(2) There is wide variation across countries in the proportions of men who have ever paid for sex. Among European populations, on average about 15% of men have ever paid for sex. But there is also great variation: 6.6% in Britain, 39% in Spain (Rissel *et al.* 2003: 191). In at least some Asian countries, much higher proportions of men, in fact a majority, have paid for sex, as Thailand's example (73%) demonstrates.

(3) In most cases, much smaller proportions of men buy sex regularly. E.g., in Australia, close to 1 in 6 Australian men (15.6%) have ever paid for sex, but only 1.9% did so in the last year. Nearly all (97%) was with women. (Among women on the other hand, only 0.1% has ever paid for sex.)

Close to 9% of men in London aged 16-44, and 4.3% nationally, have paid for sex in the past five years (Johnson *et al.* 2001), representing approximately 2.5 million commercial sex transactions.

(4) There is some evidence of an increase in the proportions of men buying sex.

For example, a UK survey found a doubling over a decade in the proportion of men who had paid for sex in the last year, from 2% in 1990 to 4.2% in 2000 (Johnson *et al.* 2001). In another UK survey among men aged 16 to 44, the proportion who had ever purchased sex increased from 5.6% in 1990 to 8.8% in 2000 (Ward *et al.* 2005: 468). (On the other hand, Australian figures suggest a decrease.)

Who are the men that buy sex?

The men who use commercial sex are average men.

Men who pay for sex tend to be representative of men in general. They:

- Come from all socio-economic groups, rich and poor and in-between;
- May have professional, managerial or manual jobs;
- May be in full-time or part-time employment or unemployed;
- Mostly have wives or girlfriends, with the majority in long-term partnerships;
- Usually do not have a criminal record.

Men who pay for sex come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Most, one half to one third, are in sexual relationships.

However, some men are more likely than other men to pay for sex.

Men who pay for sex are more likely than other men to:

- Be older, e.g. over 39 years;
- Have had a greater number of sexual partners;
- Be gay, bisexual, or homosexually active;
- Live in supportive cultural climates.

Male clients are more likely than other men to be unmarried, less likely to be happily married if married, and more likely to participate in other aspects of the sex industry (such as pornography) and have more liberal attitudes toward sexuality.

Nationally representative surveys of sexual behaviour in the UK and Australia suggest that sexual orientation is a further factor. Homosexually active men are more likely than heterosexually active men to have paid for sex at any time and in the previous year (Rissel et al. 2003: 192).

There is some evidence that prostitution use for some men is part of a cluster of sexually adventurous and risk-taking behaviours. Australian research found that men who had ever paid for sex also were more likely than other men to drink alcohol in excess, have injected illicit drugs, have elevated psychosocial distress, to have ever been diagnosed with an STI, and to have taken an HIV test (Rissel et al. 2003: 195). They were more likely to have had a higher number of sexual partners over their lifetime, to have had vaginal intercourse before the age of 16, and to have had heterosexual anal intercourse (Rissel et al. 2003: 195).

A recent report titled *Challenging men's demand for prostitution in Scotland* suggests that male buyers are more likely than other men to endorse violence-supportive attitudes and to practise sexual coercion with their non-prostitute sexual partners. However, other, larger-scale research suggests that male clients are no more likely to accept rape myths as true than national samples of men (Monto and Hotaling 2001).¹

Diversity in men's use of prostitution

Men's use of prostitution is diverse, with diversities in patterns and trajectories of use and in types of client.

In patterns of first use

In overall patterns of use

There is evidence of different types of clients. For example, one study distinguished between occasional and habitual buyers: occasional buyers are more sensitive to legal measures and more worried about public prosecution, while habitual buyers are not (Hughes 2004: 14, citing Mansson).

Typologies of clients...

Different markets = different clients

Different markets – street versus lap dancing, domestic versus international – involve different clients with differing motivations.

¹ Also see Sanders *et al.* (2008) A Commentary on 'Challenging Men's Demand for Prostitution in Scotland': A Research Report Based on Interviews with 110 Men who Bought Women in Prostitution, (Jan Macleod, Melissa Farley, Lynn Anderson, Jacqueline Golding, 2008).

What motivations do men have for buying sex?

Motivations for buying sex

Men's motivations for commercial sex have been classified in various ways. However, common motivations identified in the literature include men's interests in and desires for:

- Certain types of sexual practices (such as fellatio or anal sex)
- Sex with different people
- Sex with a person with a certain image (e.g., sexy, raunchy, etc.) or with specific physical attributes (e.g., racial, transgender) (Weitzer 2005: 223)
- Uncomplicated or non-emotional sex
- Companionship, socialising, time (Lever & Dolnick, 2000)
- Convenience or simplicity
- Illicit and risky encounters (McKeganey & Barnard, 1996)
- Power, hostility, and callousness

Many customers emphasise that they seek a 'girlfriend experience', with elements of intimacy and romance (Weitzer 2005: 224). For others, use of female prostitutes is informed by hostile attitudes to women and a sense of entitlement (Hughes 2004: 20).

Masculinities and prostitution

If we turn now to a more social analysis, it is obvious that men's use of prostitution is grounded in wider constructions of male sexuality and masculinity.

Men's use of commercial sex expresses dominant constructions of masculinity.

There are powerful norms of male sexuality which shape men's involvements as clients of prostitutes, including:

- A non-relational sexuality: an interest in casual, decontextualised, or impersonal sex

(And a habitual, even obsessive, focus on sexual acts and body parts.)

- The notion of male sexuality as an uncontrollable or barely controllable force (Kippax, Crawford, & Waldby, 1994, p. S318; Richardson, 1997, p. 161; Wilton, 1997, p. 34), and prostitution as a natural and inevitable outlet for men's sexual 'needs';
- The organization of heterosexual sex around men's sexual needs and men's sexual pleasure (Foreman, 1998, p. 22; Wight, 1994; Wilton, 1997, p. 34);
- A sexual double standard, involving male sexual licence, the policing of female sexuality, and notions of two types of woman, 'madonna' and 'whore' or 'nice girl' and 'slut' (Hillier, Harrison, & Warr, 1998, p. 26; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1996, p. 242; Kitzinger, 1995; Stewart, 1999).

To the extent that men use physical or sexual violence against prostitutes, this too can express wider gender norms and relations, including;

- Sexism, sexual callousness and hostility, and a lack of empathy;
- Norms of sexual coerciveness and of sexual force as 'sexy';
- And gendered inequalities of power.

Men's use of commercial sex often is organised or encouraged through masculine relations.

It is clear too that men's relations with other men mediate their use of commercial sex. Homosocial or male-male relations are a powerful influence on men's sexual relations with women (Flood 2008). For example, young men's first use of prostitutes often is facilitated by older men, sometimes as sexual initiation. This is much truer in some cultural contexts, such as in India and Thailand for example, and less so for example in Scandinavian countries (Anderson & Davidson 2003: 18). Also, masculine workplaces and cultures may involve the organisation of collective visits to prostitutes.

Men's violence in prostitution

Men's violence against women is shaped by three broad factors...

Men's violence against women is shaped above all by three broad factors: first, and above all, gender norms and gender relations; second, social norms and practices related to other forms of violence; and third, access to material and social resources and patterns of social injustice. I reviewed these and other factors in developing a framework for the primary prevention of violence against women, published as *Preventing Violence Before It Occurs*. (See me for copies.)

Violence and exploitation in prostitution are shaped above all by sex workers' working conditions.

Sex workers' risks of victimisation are shaped above all by their working conditions: by their access to resources for protection, their freedom to refuse clients and particular sex acts, and their dependence on others (Weitzer 2005: 215-6). It is mistaken to think that violence and degradation are universal, inherent, and unalterable in prostitution (*ibid.*: 213).

There are very large contrasts in rates of victimisation between street prostitutes on the one hand and call girls, brothel workers, and escorts on the other. E.g., in a British study, 27% of street workers, but only 1% of other workers, had been beaten. 22% of street workers, but only 2% of other workers, had been raped (Weitzer 2005: 216).

A minority of male customers perpetrate most violence against sex workers.

A study of over 2,300 arrested customers found that most are not violent, and a relatively small proportion are responsible for most violence against sex workers.

The shift to a focus on demand

In terms of policy and legal responses to prostitution, there has been a significant shift towards a focus on *demand* – on the demand for prostitution. There is an obvious rationale for this.

The rationale for focusing on demand

Demand is central. Although supply also generates demand.

First, demand is a key driver of prostitution. In one sense, without the demand for prostitution, there would be no supply. However, it's also clear that in many ways, it is supply that generates demand. And that supply is shaped by unregulated and exploitable labour, social norms, and other factors (Anderson and Davidson 2003).

It is unjust to police the women who sell sex but not the men who buy it.

Second, in terms of laws and policies regarding prostitution, there is a clear injustice in policing only the women who sell sex and not the men who buy it. Policies focused on the arrest and conviction of female sex workers embody a sexual double standard (Monto 2001).

Focusing on workers has been ineffective.

Third, a focus on policing female sex workers has been ineffective in stopping prostitution (Monto 2001).

The emergence of male buyers / users / clients as a problem

Historically, men who pay for sex have been absent from moral debate, political agendas, policy intervention, and policing practice (Sanders 2008: 135). However, since the 1980s, male buyers (particularly with regard to street prostitution) have emerged as ‘the problem’.

Strategies addressing (male) buyers of commercial sex

The shift towards a focus on male clients is embodied in various legal and policy shifts in Western countries, and in the emergence of new forms of prevention and intervention among male clients.

Legal and policy measures: Criminalising buyers

Example: The Swedish model

The most famous is the Swedish model. Adopting the view that prostitution is “a form of male sexual violence against women and children” (Ekberg 2004: 1189), in 1999 the Swedish government adopted the law that prohibits the purchase of sexual services. In other words, this law criminalises the *buyers* of commercial sex. A similar law was adopted in Norway in 2009. Other countries such as South Africa also have introduced laws criminalising the purchase of sex but retain laws also punishing selling sexual services (Jeffreys 2009: 204), or criminalising the purchase of sexual services in public places such as in Finland (Hughes 2004: 28). While a UK review considered the Swedish model, it concluded that this was ‘a step too far’ although recommending other measures to curb demand (Home Office 2008).

The Swedish law is said by its proponents to have reduced the numbers of women in street prostitution, to have reduced the numbers of buyers, and at least anecdotally, to have kept levels of trafficking constant while they have increased in neighbouring countries (Ekberg 2004: 1193-4, 1199). However, others argue that it has had relatively little positive effect. For example, Sanders (2008: 177-8) notes the very small numbers of arrests and convictions. She cites data suggesting that there has been no significant decrease in sex workers since the law was introduced, and hidden prostitution has increased.

Laws and policies addressing the use of trafficked persons

Some other European countries have laws which criminalise the knowing purchase of sexual services from a person who has been trafficked, or criminalising the buying of sexual services in public places. There have also been legal efforts to combat foreign travel to purchase sex acts, or ‘sex tourism’, e.g. through extra-territorial laws (Hughes 2004: 28-30).

Other legal, quasi-legal and extra-legal measures

A whole range of other legal and quasi-legal measures have been adopted to attempt to curb demand for prostitution, for example in the US and UK, especially in relation to street prostitution. These are applied to individuals arrested or convicted for soliciting prostitutes, and include vehicle seizure, zoning and prohibition zones (which restrict offenders from entering certain areas), driving bans, and anti-social behaviour orders and acceptable behaviour contracts (Willoughby 08: 6-7).

Programs for buyers / clients / users – ‘Johns schools’

Another increasingly common measure, again particularly in the US, is programs for buyers of commercial sex, often known as ‘Johns schools’. They aim typically to teach the men that prostitution is a system of violence against women rather than a ‘victimless crime’ (Hughes 2004: 32).

Such programs typically are for men charged with soliciting street prostitutes. Most are diversion programs, where the men avoid a possible conviction if they attend. Programs use a diversity of educational approaches and practices, from ‘shaming rituals’ presented by survivors of prostitution to appeals to men’s self-interest (Hughes 2004: 32). In doing the latter, some emphasise the threats to these men from diseased and drug-addicted prostitutes and a violent underworld.

Evaluations of programs for buyers of commercial sex are rare, and limited usually to immediate post-intervention assessment. While some document positive attitude change, and participants reporting that they are unlikely to attempt to purchase sex acts again, they also find that ‘veterans’ or habitual users are less likely to change their behaviour (Hughes 2004: 39-40). One substantial evaluation among men arrested for trying to hire street prostitutes found no difference in recidivism between men who attended an intervention program and men who did not, and very low rates of recidivism overall, close to 1% (Monto 2001). It may be that arrest itself is the most significant deterrent to further prostitution use. On the other hand, perhaps most men arrested are first-time and occasional customers, and while men continue to buy sex, they avoid rearrest because they gain both knowledge and personal networks of prostitutes (*ibid.*). There are also faith-based healing and treatment programs for men, typically addressing a range of behaviours associated with ‘sexual sin’ or ‘sexual addiction’ (Hughes 2004: 45-47).

Such programs have been criticised on various grounds. Their effectiveness is questionable. They do not address men’s motivations for seeking commercial sex. They may involve legal processes which are problematic or which do not involve due process (Sanders 2008: 156). They are based on radical feminist understandings of prostitution which are limited (Campbell 2001: 95).

Neighbourhood and community measures: Naming and shaming

One of the most common strategies for addressing demand is the ‘naming and shaming’ of men suspected or convicted of purchasing sex, by publicising their names, photos and other details on TV, websites, in newspapers, on billboards, and so on. (Controversially, some efforts target men merely arrested, rather than convicted.) (Willoughby 2008: 4). Newspapers and other bodies have tried to gain access to and publish the names of men found in the ‘black books’ kept by pimps, brothel and escort service operators, and others (Hughes 2004: 44).

Criticism:

Naming and shaming efforts have received various criticisms. They have been seen to violate individuals’ civil rights, have a negative impact on their families, disproportionately shame men of colour, and shaming itself may have a negative impact in inciting recidivism (Sanders 2008: 157-158; Willoughby 2008: 5-6). Such community measures are seen to reinforce conservative sexual norms that lessen sympathy for women in prostitution, and they can increase the stigma and marginalisation of sex workers e.g. by portraying them as diseased and contaminating (*ibid.*).

Other community-based measures

Neighbourhood groups often have focused their efforts on harassing women and trying to drive them away. But a few associations now focus on demand, trying to impede or drive away men, using a whole variety of tactics (Hughes 2004: 41).

Communications and social marketing

Communication and social marketing have been used to attempt to deter demand, particularly by raising awareness of commercial sexual exploitation (Willoughby 2008: 6). Media campaigns have been aimed at potential sex tourists in the US and at popular sex tourist destinations (Hughes 2004: 47-48).

Some communications efforts have addressed the potential buyers of trafficked women. A UK campaign states, “Walk in a punter, walk out a rapist”. It says, “Trafficked women are forced into

selling sex. Forced sex is rape. So if you pay for sex with a trafficked woman what does that make you?" Another campaign addresses buyers in general. In Lithuania, another poster campaign states, "It is shameful to buy a woman! Moreover, sooner or later everybody will find out about it!"

One notable primary prevention effort was conducted among young men in the Philippines in 2004. After initial focus groups, the program involved three-day camps for the young men, a video, and flyers and comic books, among young men aged 17-18 (CATW Asia Pacific, n.d.).

Organisational and workplace strategies

Finally, there have been some organisational and workplace efforts to deter demand for prostitution, particularly in the military. The US Department of Defense adopted such efforts in and around its bases in the Philippines and South Korea, including policing personnel's avoidance of 'off-limits' establishments associated with trafficking and providing training for staff. Similar efforts have been undertaken for example among peacekeeping and military personnel in the Balkans (Hughes 2004: 52-55).

Resources for deterring demand

Among men, there are important resources for deterring demand, both among men who already pay for sex and men who do not. Focusing on buyers, these include the following.

Buyers' dissatisfaction with commercial sex

Various studies find that most male buyers do not and did not enjoy sex with prostitutes (Weitzer 2005: 224).

Buyers' awareness of the limits of sex work itself

Most male customers reject the idea that sex workers enjoy their work or want to be prostitutes. Most would not want their daughters to become prostitutes (Weitzer 2005: 224), although many do see it as acceptable for their sons to go to brothels (MacLeod *et al.* 2008: 26).

Buyers' guilt and shame

Significant proportions of male buyers are troubled by their behaviour, and may be amenable to change (Hughes 2004: 16). They experience regret, disappointment, and guilt (MacLeod *et al.* 2008: 18).

Buyers' fears of discovery

Related to this, buyers themselves suggest that they would be deterred from prostitution use by public exposure, jail time, higher fines, and so on (MacLeod *et al.* 2008: 27-28).

Assessing efforts to address demand

Criticisms

Focused on street prostitution, not evaluated, stigmatising

A number of criticisms have been made of these efforts to deter men's demand for prostitution. They focus largely or exclusively on street prostitution. They are largely without evaluation or evidence of effectiveness. They may push prostitution activity further underground, thus putting women in greater danger (Willoughby 2008: 8). Some worsen the stigma of prostitution.

Reducing demand, by itself, may be harmful.

The most fundamental criticism is that it is problematic to reduce demand by itself. In a particular context, reducing the client base for prostitution can mean increased competition among sex

workers for customers, longer hours, lower prices, quicker negotiations, and workers taking greater risks regarding their sexual health and safety (Campbell 2001: 99-100).

Thus, we must address the socioeconomic factors which shape women's entry into prostitution (Campbell 2001: 99). Demand deterrence strategies "should always be coupled with exit and support strategies for those in the sex trade" (Willoughby 2008: 8).

Addressing men's demand for sexual coercion and exploitation in particular

Rather than addressing the demand for commercial sex *per se*, there is an argument for addressing the demand for sexual coercion and exploitation in particular (although these overlap). For example, this means examining male customers' preferences for young women, underage girls and young women, or particular racial and ethnic categories of women. An international study of male customers found that close to one quarter preferred women under the age of 18, and there was a wider, almost universal preference for young women (Hughes 2004: 8). Some men show a preference for foreign prostitutes, e.g. because they are seen as 'cheaper and more malleable'.

There are debates about the relationship between men's use of adult prostitutes and their use of children, with some reports noting patterns of both preferential and opportunistic child sexual abuse (Hughes 2004: 23).

To address men's violence in prostitution, key strategies include challenging and policing violent clients, and improving buyers' treatment of prostitutes. Some have suggested that education programs for buyers, and more widespread education efforts, should work to educate men who purchase commercial sex about safety, sexual health, and respectable behaviour towards sex workers (Campbell 2001: 198; Sanders 2008: 157).

Conclusion

Goal: Not to deter buying sex, but to prevent violence and exploitation in commercial sex

To conclude: I believe that our priority is not to deter men (or women) from buying sex *per se*, although there are many ways in which this is desirable, but to prevent violence and exploitation in prostitution. We must examine the conditions and factors which make violence and exploitation in prostitution more likely, and the ways in which it could be organised in ways which limit these. And, in addressing demand, we must focus on those buyers who use or tolerate violence and abuse against women and children.

Principles to guide this work

Our work to address sexual violence and exploitation in prostitution and trafficking should be guided by several principles. It should involve;

- Participation of the women and men who sell or exchange sex;
- Careful attention to its impact on the lives and health of women and men;
- Resistance to conservative sexual agendas in which sexual relations outside marital, monogamous, heterosexuality are condemned if not criminalised.
- Attention to the local and global economic, social, and political conditions and forces which shape men's and women's involvements in sex and sex work.

Prostitution is a men's issue

There are powerful ways in which male-female prostitution is much more about men than it is about women. Prostitution is more about men's sexuality than women's. To address violence and exploitation in prostitution and elsewhere, we must erode the cultural and collective supports for

violence found among many men and boys, foster equitable gender relations in relationships, families, and communities, and address local and global injustices.

References

Note: The following is a partial list of references. Also see further references on male clients here: <http://mensbiblio.xyonline.net/sexwork.html#Maleclients>.

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